

**Sermon Text: John 13:31-35** <sup>31</sup> So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. <sup>32</sup> "If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. <sup>33</sup> "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. <sup>34</sup> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

**Sermon Theme: Jesus Gives Us the New Command to Love Each Other.**

In the name of the crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ, who blesses us with spiritual life, dear fellow redeemed;

A newspaper article in a major U.S. city written some time ago had the headline, "Anger is all the rage at home, at work, on the road, we are collectively losing it." The article drew attention to the troubling and frightening condition of increasing instances of people venting their anger on others in various mean-spirited and violent ways. The observation was made that "managing one's temper once was considered a virtue," but that now society seems "to have collectively lost it." To illustrate this, the article stated concerning present day society, "On the street, we hiss and snarl and hit. On the bus, we argue and swear. In the car, we flip the bird, curse and ram other drivers. In our homes, we sulk, pitch dishes, throw punches and worse. At work, we belittle employees, sabotage bosses, and sometimes reach for a gun. On talk shows, we rage at ex-husbands, girlfriends, children, parents, and neighbors. If none of that works, we drag 'em into court. And sometimes, as one man did last month with his wife and two of her friends, we shoot them there."

What was noticeably absent in the newspaper article on this topic is the identification of the root cause and the ultimate cure for it. This should not surprise us when we find the author speaking on the one hand of anger being originally found in supposedly hairy prehistoric ancestors of man and saying that anger is a good emotion gone bad, and on the other hand stating that the solutions of dealing with anger are relaxing, taking deep breaths, counting to 10 or 100 and trying to get it out of our system by simply talking or writing about it. The world in its spiritual darkness leaves completely out of the picture the reality of the sin-corrupted heart of man out of which proceeds evil thoughts, murderers, adulteries, fornication, and so on. It also disregards and discounts the existence of a Redeemer God who delivers us from the control of sin and the power of Satan.

In the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, we find a Scripture reference that helps us to better understand how it is that there are individuals in society who seem to have no trouble giving full expression to their evil emotions in words or actions, and who apparently have no conscience pangs or remorse over hurting or murdering innocent people. Paul writes about such senseless violence and other immoral behavior in the world, and the underlying reason for it, saying, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife,

deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.” (Rom. 1:28-30)

With the help of the godless teaching of humanism, Hollywood glamorizing sex and violence, radical elements of Islam preaching hatred and the murder of innocent people, and finally through sheer neglect by parents, unbelievers have been ushered into society who do not acknowledge the one true God, His holy commandments or His redeeming love for them in Christ Jesus. As a result, we observe growing numbers of those who do not feel compelled to hold in check their evil emotions, but rather act on them, wreaking havoc on others.

The message from today’s Scripture text presents an entirely different picture. It speaks of people who behave in a manner quite unlike what we have just described. We read of a group of folks displaying reciprocal love for one another. Addressing His disciples the Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” With these words, Jesus not only exhorts us to show love for each other and identifies the kind of love we are to exercise, but also reveals that as Christians we possess a spirit of love by which we are able to speak to and treat one another in a loving manner.

Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments might wonder why Jesus refers to this commandment to love one another as being something new. The 4<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> commandments all clearly prescribe how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. While the injunction to love is the same, yet what is new and different about Jesus’ command is that which lies behind it, namely our Savior Jesus Christ making it possible for us to love each other both in word and deed.

The divine commandments handed down at Mt. Sinai never carried with them the power to impart or instill love in the hearts of sinful mankind. In addition to spelling out how God wants us to live in love, the law of God reveals how we are by nature lost and condemned sinners who miserably fail to love God and our neighbor. And since that same law reveals our deserved punishment and our inability to save ourselves from it, it helps us to see how we are greatly in need of a Savior. In 2 Corinthians, Paul testifies that the letter of the law kills, whereas the Spirit of God gives us life.

How vain and futile it is for people in the world to think the disobedient, rebellious, lawless, and perverse can be changed into loving and caring individuals simply by teaching them how they should behave and by telling them about the benefits of so doing. Oh, this might help bring about a superficial, outward change. But it certainly cannot instill love in human hearts that are dead in trespasses and sins.

Spiritual life and love come from God in Christ Jesus. In his letter to Titus, Paul tells us how he and all other Christians have been transformed into new creations through the gracious working of God in their hearts. He writes to Titus, “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying,

and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” (3:3-8) Paul and all other believers are transformed from serving their sinful nature in loveless words and deeds to those who serve God, showing love for God and our fellow man. This marvelous change takes place by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in word and sacrament. He breathes new spiritual life into our hearts and minds by enabling us to know and believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Jesus’ tremendous unconditional, redeeming love for us which He showed by living and dying for our forgiveness and salvation instills love in our hearts so that we show love for God and love for our neighbor, yes, even for our enemies.

In his first letter, the apostle John writes the following about the spirit of Christian love which God creates in our hearts, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren... And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” (3:11-16,23,24)

This portion of Scripture brings out yet another aspect of Jesus’ new commandment to love when it speaks of Christians showing love for each other, that is, Christian for Christian. This commandment did not replace or set aside God’s will for us to love all our neighbors. Not at all. But the newness of Jesus’ command to love others is that He is speaking to a special group of people who unlike countless unbelievers are able to show a reciprocal love for each other. As Christians we are able to do this, because we share a common knowledge, faith, hope, and love in Christ Jesus.

In the book of Acts, we read of that reciprocal love demonstrated by Christians in the early church in Jerusalem, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.” (2:44-47a)

Besides these examples of mutual Christian love, there is also the shared love that Christian family members have toward one another—parents toward their children, children toward their parents, and siblings toward each other. This indeed stands out as a striking contrast to what is happening in the world about us.

We can be thankful to God for blessing us with Christian parents who brought us to the Lord early on, first of all having us baptized in the Christian faith and then bringing us up in the nurture and training of the Lord.

As Jesus spoke of showing our love for one another, He said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Mutual Christian love is a mark of distinction that stands out and sets us apart in the world. It is Jesus’ most fervent hope and

prayer that unbelievers will witness the loving ways of Christians and thus become interested in learning of the saving ways of Christ which lie behind the spirit of Christian love.

With this being said, this does not mean we never have the problem of the evil emotion of anger rising within our hearts or never being guilty of angry words or behavior. If this was not the case, Paul wouldn't have found the need to exhort us with these words of God, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4:31,32)

Because we have a sinful nature to contend with, there will always be times when sinful emotions crop up in our minds and hearts. But the Lord helps us through His Word by leading us to repent of them. Also through His gracious Word God instills increased faith and love so that we are better able to resist and overpower those evil thoughts and emotions. And when we give way to evil emotions in speaking loveless words and in hurtful behavior, the Holy Spirit moves us to confess our sin in contrition, look to Jesus in faith for forgiveness, and pray God to help us love one another even as He loved us in Christ Jesus.

And so, looking to God who is the source of faith and love, we pray with the hymn writer:

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, with all Your graces now outpoured on each believer's mind and heart; Your fervent love to them impart, Lord, by the brightness of Your light in holy faith Your Church unite; from ev'ry land and ev'ry tongue this to Your praise, O Lord, our God be sung: Alleluia, alleluia!

Come, holy Light, guide divine, now cause the Word of life to shine. Teach us to know our God aright and call Him Father with delight. From ev'ry error keep us free; let none but Christ our master be that we in living faith abide, in Him, our Lord, with all our might confide. Alleluia, alleluia!

Come, holy Fire, comfort true, grant us the will Your work to do and in Your service to abide; let trials turn us not aside. Lord, by Your pow'r prepare each heart, and to our weakness strength impart that bravely here we may contend, through life and death to You, our Lord, ascend. Alleluia, alleluia! Amen. (LSB 497)